



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

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Summer Safety Reminder: The Dangers of Heat

Children, elderly and ill at highest risk of harm in soaring temperatures

RICHMOND – Virginia's summers typically produce temperatures in the 90s, however triple digit days can be common. On days like these, heat exposure can present health and safety dangers, especially for children, the elderly, and those who have certain medical conditions. Very high body temperatures and dehydration from heat exposure can damage the brain and other vital organs, and even result in death. The Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS) reminds residents to take proper safety precautions for their families.

"Summer days are for everyone to enjoy, especially children, but too much heat isn't good for anyone," said VDSS Commissioner Martin D. Brown. "Too often, our local departments of social services see the negative – and sometimes tragic – results of a child, senior citizen or person with an illness or disabilities having been left unattended without proper cooling."

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), temperatures inside a car can climb from 78 degrees to 100 degrees in just three minutes, to 125 degrees in 6-8 minutes. When left in a hot vehicle, a young child's body temperature may increase three to five times as fast as an adult.

Whether in a hot vehicle or a home without proper cooling, heat stroke occurs when the body becomes unable to control its temperature and may result in an individual's body temperature reaching 106°F or higher within 10 to 15 minutes. Children's bodies overheat easily, and infants and children under four years of age, also at risk are the elderly, especially those with medical conditions.

"We encourage everyone to be aware of the dangers to the very young and very old in our families," said Jack Ledden, VDSS Director of Family Services. "Each year in Virginia, we see tragedies that occur because children are exposed to the extreme heat, often due to being left in cars for extended periods of time. This is a totally preventable cause of death for children. We hope that neighbors also take a few moments to check on elderly members of their community to see how they are fairing in the heat, particularly if their home is not equipped with air conditioning or a fan. In summer heat conditions, it does not take long for these vulnerable individuals to experience life threatening situations."

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A list of NHTSA safety tips and information can be found at <http://www.nhtsa.gov/Driving+Safety/Child+Safety/Keeping+Kids+Safe+-+Hyperthermia+and+Heatstroke>, including:

- Never leave a child unattended in a vehicle. Never leave infants or children in a parked vehicle, even if windows are partially open.
- Do not let children play in an unattended vehicle.
- Make a habit of looking in the vehicle - front and back - before locking the door and walking away.
- Ask your childcare provider to call you if your child does not show up for child care.
- Always lock vehicle doors and trunks and keep keys out of children's reach. If a child is missing, check the vehicle first, including the trunk.
- If you see a child alone in a hot vehicle, call the police. If they are in distress due to heat, get them out as quickly as possible. Cool the child rapidly. Call 911 or your local emergency number immediately.

Heat inside a home can be dangerous, as well. A dwelling without adequate cooling can reach temperatures inside that match or exceed those outside. Virginia's [120 local departments of social services](#) will continue to accept [Cooling Assistance](#) applications through Aug. 15. This energy assistance program provides financial help to those eligible for electric bills to cover cooling costs, repair or replacement of an air conditioning unit, purchase of a fan, and more.

Residents can also dial 2-1-1 toll-free or visit www.211VIRGINIA.org for information on assistance and cooling shelters. 2-1-1 VIRGINIA is a service of VDSS and, using an extensive database, provides free, confidential information and referrals around the clock.

Additional tips for staying safe in the summer heat can be found at the Virginia Department of Health's website at: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/PressKits/Summer/>.

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